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PERIODIC REPORT ON EVALUATION

Report of the Executive Director

1. This report on UNFPA evaluation activities in 1994 and 1995 has been prepared for the information of the Executive Board in response to Governing Council decisions 82/20 and 90/35 A, which requested the Executive Director to make biennial reports on evaluation to the Council. It also provides information on initiatives taken to strengthen the monitoring of UNFPA's programme. No decision is requested of the Board.

I. PROJECT AND PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS

2. The number of project evaluations undertaken in 1994-1995 showed a remarkable increase from the previous biennium -- 310 compared to 220. Most of these were end-of-project evaluations initiated by UNFPA field offices. In addition, recognition of the importance of evaluation in the programming process appeared to have taken hold in the organizational culture in that new projects approved in 1994 and 1995, both country as well as intercountry, incorporated almost without exception an evaluation component.

3. Evaluation planning, however, is still an area that requires continued effort. The review of projects and of project evaluation reports indicates that greater attention should be paid at the stage of project formulation in laying the foundations for meaningful evaluations. Critical elements such

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as the purpose of and methodology for proposed evaluations, the baseline data and measurable indicators were all too often missing or poorly articulated in project design. This needs to be addressed from two perspectives. On the one hand, in the process of simplifying the formats of project request forms and project documents, it is important to ensure that the prerequisites for proper monitoring and evaluation, particularly of substantive achievements, receive due attention. On the other hand, proper guidance and training must be provided to parties, particularly national authorities, concerned with project formulation so that they can conceptualize, articulate and address evaluation needs at the design stage.

4. The preparation for programme review and strategy development (PRSD) exercises, which is the principal tool for developing country programmes, should ideally include an analysis of how well the previous UNFPA programme has performed. For this reason, country programme evaluations have rarely been conducted since the adoption of the PRSD approach. Reviews of the PRSD reports, however, indicate that the analysis of programme performance tended to be weak. In recognition of this, the idea of carrying out country programme evaluations has been receiving increased attention. In 1994 country programmes in Benin, Comoros, Mauritania and Mozambique were evaluated, followed by Bolivia, Cape Verde, Chad, Ghana, India and Panama in 1995.

5. These country programme evaluations were conducted in combination with or immediately following sectoral reviews as part of the PRSD process. In most cases, they were initiated and managed by the concerned field office and were accomplished through different modalities. In the Africa region, they were conducted by Country Support Team (CST) advisers together with national experts; elsewhere, they were carried out by a combination of CST advisers, national and international experts and/or UNFPA staff.

6. At the intercountry level, two major evaluations were undertaken during the period under review: the independent evaluation of the technical support services system (TSS) in 1994 and of the Global Programme of Training in Population and Development, phase II, in 1995. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation of the TSS system as well as UNFPA's reactions to them were presented to the Executive Board at its 1995 annual session in document DP/1995/40.

7. The objective of the evaluation of the Global Programme was to ascertain the extent to which it has achieved its immediate objectives and whether the recommendations of the evaluation of the first phase had been implemented, with a view to making recommendations for its future strategy. The component training programmes in institutions participating in the second phase of the programme, namely, the Centro Latino Americano de Demografia (CELADE) in Santiago, Chile; the Cairo Demographic Centre (CDC) in Cairo, Egypt; the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in Trivandrum, India; the Centre International de Formation et de Recherche en Population et Développement en Association avec les Nations Unies (CIDEP) in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium; and the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, Netherlands, were evaluated by teams of

consultants. In each case, besides reviewing extensive documentation, including course outlines, teaching texts, participants' reports, etc., discussions were held with faculty members and participants, as well as with officials of the host institutions. In some cases, the evaluation team audited lectures and presentations by participants. The evaluation made recommendations specific to each component programme in respect of course content, pedagogical approach and programme administration, with due recognition of the characteristics of the respective host institution. At the same time, it also raised a number of issues pertaining to programme design, strategy and the implementation of the overall Global Programme.

8. The evaluation found that the major challenge facing the Global Programme is how to address population and development integration in the contemporary context. At present, each component programme pursues a significantly distinctive strategy, in part reflecting the strengths of the host institution and in part reflecting the as-yet weak understanding of the integrated population and development framework. The evaluation felt that positive efforts had been made by the various component programmes to incorporate recent and ongoing changes in the field of development policy and of population and development planning into their design and strategy. There was, however, little evidence of substantive cross-fertilization among component programmes. Certain implementation and monitoring issues were also highlighted for UNFPA's attention.

9. The four-year (1992-1995) UNFPA/CELADE regional project was evaluated in the spring of 1995 by a team of experts comprising three independent consultants and one senior technical officer from UNFPA. The evaluation assessed programme design and performance in order to ascertain the extent to which progress had been made towards meeting the planned objectives, with particular attention to efforts to effect a transfer of knowledge and technology to countries in the region. In addition, an assessment was made of the substantive capacity that had been installed at CELADE and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in areas of potential collaboration, given the respective mandates and work programmes of ECLAC/CELADE and UNFPA following the ICPD.

10. The evaluation found that even though the quality of outputs of the project had not suffered as a result of severe budget cuts during the programme period, the coverage of countries in terms of knowledge dissemination, awareness creation and field testing of methodological instruments had been adversely affected. In addition, resource constraints could seriously limit the role of CELADE in research and training, jeopardizing its role as a "window" to, from and for the Latin American region on population issues. The evaluation also concluded that without external assistance the development of methods and techniques in support of the ICPD goals would ultimately suffer.

11. The evaluation noted that the focus of CELADE's work had evolved appropriately, reflecting the changes in the region over time. It also found that in terms of technical assistance, CELADE had

complemented the multidisciplinary services of the CST based in Santiago, Chile, by providing it with the needed demographic database and research techniques developed over the years.

II. THEMATIC EVALUATIONS

12. During the biennium, the evaluation of UNFPA's support for the local production of contraceptives was completed. This evaluation studied projects in China, India and Vietnam that support local production of a variety of contraceptive methods. The evaluation found that UNFPA support had been able to help bring about major improvements in the supply and availability of modern, effective contraceptives in these countries. At the same time, the difficulties experienced with technical monitoring and backstopping as well as in ensuring sustainability of contraceptive production projects indicated that the Fund should be deliberate and prudent in providing future support in this area. The evaluation underscored important lessons with respect to, inter alia, feasibility studies, selection of method(s) for production, technology selection and transfer, project sustainability, good manufacturing practices, training, regulatory system(s) and product promotion and related information, education and communication (IEC) activities. The main findings, conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation are available in a report published by UNFPA.

13. Case studies relating to a thematic evaluation of programmes supporting traditional birth attendants (TBAs) were completed. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of UNFPA's support for TBAs as a strategy for improving reproductive health and for decreasing maternal mortality and morbidity. The countries selected for the case studies were Bolivia, Ghana, Iran, Malawi, Nepal, Syrian Arab Republic and Uganda because they present a wide range of country situations and TBA programmes at different stages of development.

14. Preliminary findings indicate that TBA training programmes in general contributed to improving the quality of reproductive health services. In many instances, the content of such training, however, needed to reflect greater sensitivity to local beliefs and practices, particularly in regard to certain contraceptive methods and to issues related to HIV/AIDS. The support systems available to TBAs in terms of equipment and supplies, monitoring and supervision were found to be weak. Part of this stemmed from a lack of conviction among policy makers and programme managers about the role TBAs could play in reducing maternal mortality in the long run and their consequent reluctance to allocate resources to them. The quality of services at the first level of referral was also a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of TBAs as reproductive health promoters.

15. The findings of the case studies are being analysed. These results will be synthesized in a global report that will identify factors that impact upon the effectiveness of TBA programmes as well as make recommendations for future support in this area. The report is expected in mid-1996.

16. Another thematic evaluation in process is assessing experience with the implementation of programmes on reproductive health IEC and services for adolescents. This evaluation, for the first time, goes beyond assessing UNFPA-supported projects, endeavouring not only to highlight the strengths and weakness of such assistance but also to identify the policy, political and programmatic factors accounting for the progress, or lack thereof, in this area. The countries selected to serve as case studies are Antigua and Barbuda, Chile, Colombia, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. To date, field work has been completed in six of them.

17. The evaluation is examining, on a comparative basis, government perceptions of adolescents as a specific group with special needs and the official policies that Governments have adopted, if any, on the provision of reproductive health IEC and services for them. In addition, the appropriateness as well as the effectiveness of government strategies, including action plans and programmes, to address the reproductive health needs of adolescents will be assessed. Moreover, the role and comparative advantages of public entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), youth groups, etc., in terms of needs identification, policy and programme formulation and implementation will be analysed. Finally, the evaluation will examine the extent to which the policies and programmes that have been pursued have contributed to the overall improvement of women's status, the empowerment of women and the promotion of male responsibility. Completion of field work is expected in mid-1996, and the global synthesis report will be available in the third quarter of 1996.

18. A desk study was conducted to examine community participation approaches in reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health, projects supported by UNFPA. A preliminary review was made of 65 projects, of which 17 were selected for in-depth study. These latter included three projects in the Africa region, seven in Asia and the Pacific, six in Latin America and the Caribbean and one interregional project. It was found that conceptualization of the community participation approach was weak, which led to subsequent design as well as implementation problems. The desk review identified a number of facilitating and constraining factors with respect to community participation approaches. It also underscored a number of lessons learned that should improve future programming. This review was originally intended as the first phase of a thematic evaluation. A comparison of its outcome with current literature on the topic indicated that further in-depth assessment of this approach in UNFPA-assisted projects would not add much to the body of knowledge on the subject. Thus, it was decided not to proceed with the evaluation. The findings of the desk review were published in bulletin form.

III. FEEDBACK AND USE OF EVALUATION RESULTS

19. The established mechanisms of the Programme Committee and Project Review Committee continue to monitor the use of evaluation results in proposals of new programmes and projects proposed for UNFPA support. Projects approved in the field through decentralized approval

authority are reviewed regularly in the Project Review Committee, where the need for and use of evaluations are highlighted.

20. The renewed interest in country programme evaluations demonstrated the recognition of the need for systematic assessment of programme performance and achievements. The findings of such evaluations are fed directly into the PRSD process, particularly in the development of new programmes. The involvement of international as well as national experts enriches such exercises on the one hand and facilitates cross-fertilization and capacity building on the other.

21. As discussed in document DP/1995/40, the findings of the evaluation of the TSS system were reviewed with great deliberation in preparing the second phase of support. Most of the recommendations were accepted and acted upon while those that have longer-term implications for the structure of the system have been kept in view as the system evolves. The outcome of the evaluation of the local production of contraceptives has prompted UNFPA to proceed with greater caution in this area. The evaluation underscored a number of technical and programme considerations that now enable UNFPA to appraise requests for support for local production much more systematically. The evaluation of the CELADE project identified a number of substantive areas where CELADE enjoys comparative advantages, and these will serve as the basis for defining the focus of the next phase of collaboration between UNFPA and CELADE.

22. Working with UNFPA's in-house management information specialists, a software package to accommodate the Fund's needs for an evaluation database has been installed. The main objectives of the database are to create an institutional memory of evaluation findings; promote the dissemination and use of these findings; and to enable UNFPA to conduct trend analyses of issues and problems in project design as well as in implementation on a periodic basis.

23. Coding problems associated with the software package developed for the database have been resolved, and most evaluation reports are now reviewed and coded within two weeks of receipt. It is anticipated that over 200 evaluation reports will be included in the database by the end of 1996. This will provide a sufficient pool of data to initiate statistical analyses. To facilitate the process, the management information system specialists at UNFPA have developed a package that will provide information by region, by workplan category and by issues previously identified for inclusion in the database. With the Fund's increasing decentralization of management decisions, the challenge is to ensure that reports on evaluations initiated and managed by field offices are transmitted routinely to headquarters for entry into the system.

24. Possibilities of incorporating other information into this database are being explored. For example, efforts to include the summary reports of research results from interregional programmes supported by UNFPA have been initiated. Once the viability and utility of this effort have been assessed, the inclusion of other programme "outcomes" in the database may be considered.

IV. PROGRAMME MONITORING

25. The current UNFPA monitoring and evaluation system is based on a set of guidelines issued in August 1990. These guidelines were the product of a long process of consultation and review, both within and outside UNFPA. Efforts have been made to harmonize these guidelines with UNDP practices.

26. For a variety of reasons, it is now an appropriate juncture to revisit how the UNFPA programme of assistance is monitored. First, UNFPA's continuing commitment to increasing decentralization underscores the importance of measures to ensure accountability and the need to realign the division of labour to reflect decentralized authority. Second, the intention to simplify the procedures and documentation for approving UNFPA assistance entails making sure that monitoring and evaluation requirements are responsive to new procedures. Third, the Executive Board's endorsement of the core programme areas of reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health, population and development strategies, and advocacy, requires that these thematic dimensions be incorporated into monitoring procedures. Finally, the adoption of a programme approach emphasizes a more holistic approach to analysing programme achievements.

27. UNFPA has continued to collaborate with its partners in the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) in the development of overall monitoring and evaluation guidelines. In January 1996, detailed comments were provided on an initial draft of these guidelines. In line with the proposal in this draft that specific agency directions be titled "procedures", with the overall multi-agency document serving as "guidelines", the 1990 monitoring and evaluation guidelines are being revised and will be issued in 1996 as UNFPA Monitoring and Evaluation Procedures. A collaborative approach was taken in developing these procedures through a working group comprising international as well as national field staff and headquarters staff. This group agreed on a revised set of procedures that maintains many of the basic monitoring and evaluation actions while at the same time introducing a thematic dimension to provide an opportunity for annual reviews of the cluster of projects in each of UNFPA's core programme areas. Apart from resolving project-level issues, such reviews should maximize cross-fertilization and coordination within each thematic area.

28. Still under review is the methodology for the evaluation of country programmes. The intention is to ensure that at the end of each programme cycle there is documentation of the achievements (or lack thereof) in the phase just completed and of the lessons learned. At the same time, it is recognized that such an assessment can be accomplished through various modalities, depending on circumstances.

29. At the last annual session of the Executive Board in June 1995, the Executive Director announced her intention to initiate a process of programme audits. Towards this end, she announced in October 1995 the establishment of a system of reviews to monitor policy application in UNFPA

programmes with the objective of ensuring accountability at all levels of decision-making within the Fund to ensure compliance with its mandate and policies. In order to distinguish it from other audit exercises, these reviews are called Policy Application Reviews (PARs).

30. All programmes, both country as well as intercountry, may be subjected to PARs. Initially, the focus will be on country programmes to ascertain that appropriate mechanisms to ensure accountability and programme quality are in place as UNFPA approaches full decentralization. Towards this end, countries with fully decentralized approval authority will receive priority attention.

31. PARs will be undertaken as internal exercises by senior officers of the Fund. Each such review will focus on assessing the use of UNFPA policies, guidelines and procedures in programme development and implementation, including the use of decentralized authority; support arrangements for programme implementation, both technical and programmatic; and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation, particularly substantive, qualitative monitoring, the implementation of such arrangements, and the use of outputs. The opportunity will also be taken to assess the relevance and ease of understanding of UNFPA policies and procedures.

32. The report on each PAR is addressed directly to the Executive Director. The first such review was completed in December 1995, and a work plan has been drawn up for PARs to be conducted in 1996.

V. FUTURE PLANS

33. In 1996, the two thematic evaluations in process referred to in paragraphs 13-17 above will be completed. One major undertaking that is currently being planned is the evaluation of executing agencies requested by the Executive Board in 1994. The evaluation will make a comparative analysis of the capacity and effectiveness of organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system, that have been involved in the delivery of UNFPA assistance. As a first step, a survey has been initiated among UNFPA Country Directors to solicit their views on the prerequisites for an effective executing agency. Their responses will be key inputs to defining the indicators that will be used for the evaluation.

34. Within the context of revising monitoring and evaluation procedures, the ongoing effort among JCGP member organizations to harmonize procedures for and outputs of monitoring and evaluation will be kept fully in view. Specifically, the process of mid-term reviews of country programmes will be clarified, taking due account of the fact that such reviews are increasingly conducted as joint exercises among JCGP members. The methodology for country programme evaluations will require elaboration and refinement. The different modalities for such exercises will be explored with full recognition of the need to ensure objective assessments while at the same time promoting a sense of ownership among Governments of the outcomes of such evaluations as well as

building national capacity in the area of evaluation. The Fund is cognizant of and will collaborate fully with its partner organizations to respond to the relevant provisions of ECOSOC resolution 1995/50 on operational activities of the United Nations system for international development and General Assembly resolution 50/120 on the triennial policy review of operational activities for development.

35. With a view to refining the techniques and tools for enhancing programme quality, a number of initiatives are planned. Specifically, an effort will be made to develop indicators for programme performance to facilitate monitoring the achievement of ICPD goals. Related to this, issues in impact evaluation in population programmes will be examined with a view towards developing indicators, data and information needs, tools and methodologies for such exercises. In this connection, care will be taken to incorporate institution and capacity-building aspects in keeping with the spirit of ECOSOC resolution 1995/50 and General Assembly resolution 50/120.

36. In December 1995, UNFPA convened a consultative expert meeting on rapid assessment procedures (RAPs) and their application to population programmes. The meeting assessed, inter alia, the appropriateness of the use of RAPs at different stages in the programme and project cycles; the practical implications of quantitative and qualitative RAP applications; and the prospects for the utilization of RAP for the assessment of population programme efforts. Follow-up action in terms of case studies, development of guidelines and training will be pursued.

37. Work will continue with the process of Policy Application Reviews. The scope and methodology of such exercises will be refined as experience is gained with their actual conduct.

38. UNFPA will continue to collaborate fully with organizations in the United Nations system in strengthening the technical aspects of evaluation activities through its participation as an active member of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation. In this connection, particular attention will be paid to elaborating monitoring and evaluation principles and processes within the context of the programme approach and to performance assessments of operational activities for development.

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